

Broadening our perspective

William Lacy Swing

Upholding the human rights and dignity of migrants and people displaced is one of the major challenges of the century. The causes of migration are complex and myriad, and result in no small measure from the phenomenon of globalisation in the economic, political and cultural spheres. Human rights violations, armed conflict, natural disasters and, increasingly, climate change and environmental degradation also contribute to this unprecedented surge in human mobility.

Complex crises triggered by man-made and/or natural causes generate disorderly and predominantly forced movements of people, either internally or across borders; these not only make some populations significantly vulnerable but also have lasting implications for societies, economies, development, environments, security and governance. There is a growing recognition that existing legal categories of crisis-affected persons – such as refugees or internally displaced persons – may not fully capture the varied conditions of people in crisis situations, the many avenues used by persons to escape such situations, and the changing nature of circumstances over time.

Approaches that focus solely on displaced persons, for example, may fail to reflect other realities – such

as the high vulnerability of persons unable to migrate during crises and remaining trapped in dangerous conditions. Placing crisis-related mobility in a larger migration context can shed light on latent structural factors which determine people's migration behaviour before, during and after a crisis, and promote effective ways to protect, assist and guarantee the human rights of affected persons. The events in North Africa, in particular the Libya crisis, demonstrate the need and added value of looking at crises from a mobility standpoint, what we at IOM term a 'migration crisis'.

Complementary to humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery frameworks for complex crises, a migration management approach examines all phases related to crisis response from the standpoint of human mobility. One of the major challenges that remains is for states to coordinate among themselves and with the institutions that have the mandate and architecture to respond to these crises. IOM is taking a lead in reviewing operational systems and mechanisms to improve preparedness and response to migration crises.

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